

### Chapter 2 - Hardware and Software

#### Upgrading Software

The changes in new versions or entirely new software packages are a fact of life in this computer era. Both hardware and software are constantly being upgraded or changed as we process our work and group interactions using computers. But when is the best time to make software change or upgrade? Does the cost justify the new features and capabilities of the upgrade? These are difficult questions but ones that cannot be ignored if one hopes to continue to compete in this global legal environment.

The decision to upgrade depends upon the costs and benefits to your practice. The costs include:

- Software. Are the new features worth the cost of upgrading? What is the per copy charge and the actual installation charge? How much time is needed to configure the software on a firmwide and individual user basis? Will upgrades released within a certain period of time be covered with this purchase? Will old documents or other files need to be converted to use in the new system? Will the old report formats need to be redone? Can one import the old data into the new software change or upgrade? If I switch from WordPerfect™ to Microsoft Word™ will my macros have to be redone? If I don't upgrade will the old software still be supported and will there be continued training and support from third parties?
- Hardware. Will the new software require the hardware to be upgraded? Is the processor speed, storage or RAM sufficient for the new software? Will modems have to be purchased? Will the new software actually run faster in a Windows environment? Will larger monitors be needed to use the new "paperless" imaging software? Will other software one is considering purchasing benefit from this upgraded hardware?
- Training. Will this be a major change like from DOS to a Windows environment or an upgrade on a word processing package? Will the new software cause a reprocessing of the workflow? How much time will it take for the staff to learn and use the features of the software? Do we need a 24-hour help desk? Do we need individual training or will group training be sufficient? Will an integrated suite lower the training costs?
- Time to Learn. The time spent learning the new software will take away from billable hours and other revenue producing functions. How much time will it cost the firm?

The benefits to the firm include both objective and subjective results:

- Clients Needs and Productivity. Will the new software, for example case management, allow for the caseload per lawyer to increase with continued service levels? Can

we reduce the lawyer per secretary ratio if everyone in the firm commits to the new software? Will the professional staff use the new software? Does it provide them value? Will this meet the client demand for lower cost services?

- Competition. Do other firms already provide this service to their clients? Will we stay competitive or will we gain a competitive edge by investing in this software upgrade?

- Lower Administration Costs. Will the new software provide lower costs by increasing the internal efficiency of the firm. Does the increased efficiency and the other factors justify the cost?

- Marketing. How will our clients view this? Will they understand the changes and the benefit to them? Will the decision not to upgrade negatively impact our position with our clients and in the legal community?

- Personnel retention. Will purchasing the technologies persuade some members of the firm to stay?

*Technology - hardware and software - is an investment.* Treat it as such. The evaluation and purchase of software and hardware is like purchasing furniture for your office. Your intent is to acquire the best for a fair price that will last you for a given “investment” period. However, keep an eye on the present trends and “breakthroughs” to enable you to understand the changes for when you make your next technology investment. The costs of upgrading must be measured against the benefits to your firm. Not all upgrades are necessary for your firm to operate efficiently or competitively. Use your judgment and choose wisely.